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JOTHAM BEMUS OF BEMUS'S HEIGHTS.

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Considerable interest naturally attaches to the family which owned and occupied the ground chosen by General Gates on the advice of Count Kosciusko for the American defensive works against Burgoyne's onward march in 1777, in view of the fact that the family name became forever associated with the important battles fought in the vicinity, and that members of the family took part in them upon the American side, literally defending their home and fireside. There is a considerable amount of information in regard to this family existing, but scattered through various volumes and never before collected together in a single article it has been of little use to the historical reader or to the descendants of the original settlers. To briefly give a summary of this information is the object of this sketch.

At the time of the Burgoyne campaign there was living upon the west bank of the Hudson, about four miles north of the village of Stillwater, Jotham Bemus and his family, which consisted of his wife and six children. Bemus was a farmer, energetic and enterprising, engaged in buying cattle and in other traffic and was evidently a man in easy circumstances. He kept the only tavern of any note between Albany and Fort Edward, as Lossing relates in his *Field Book of the Revolution*, volume 1, page 45, and was well known through all the region. According to the *English Manuscripts* in the State Library, page 821, he was in 1774 a justice of the peace. He was born about 1738 and consequently was about 40 years of age at the time of the Burgoyne campaign. He is described as of stout build and of a vigorous and determined character. From Charles Neilson's account of Burgoyne's campaign, published in 1844, it is learned at page 289 that Bemus's house was the only frame dwelling included within the limits of the military operations at the Heights.

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2 5/ DERIVATION OF THE FAMILY.

At the time of the battles the family had been residents in the vicinity for at least 17 years, for the *Calendar of Land Papers* in the State Library, 164, Sept. 9, 1763, page 325, records that in 1759 the families of Bemus, Griffith and Park were occupying lands in this region. There is a strong probability that these families came to this region from Norwich, Conn. Jeremiah Griffith, who afterwards settled in Chautauqua county, was born in Norwich in July, 1758, went to Rensselaer county from which he emigrated to Chautauqua county (See Young's *History of Chautauqua County*, pp. 315-323.) In Hurd's *History of New London County*, 1882, among the inhabitants of New London in 1651 occur the names of Bemus and Park. Jotham Bemus, the subject of this sketch was married to Tryphena Moore, and the *History of New London County* gives the names of a family of Moores as living in that county previous to 1689. These facts indicate strongly that the Bemus family came to Saratoga from near Norwich, Conn., and this is further corroborated by the following from Bond's *Genealogies and History of Watertown, Mass.*, 2d edition, page 680, 2d volume: "It is conjectured that "the following Bemis family are descendants from Ephraim Bemis; Jotham Bemis and wife Tryphenia, from Connecticut "settled early in Saratoga county, N. Y., on the margin of the "Hudson river, etc."

Though the genealogical chain between Ephraim Bemis of Watertown, Mass., and Jotham Bemus of Saratoga county is not complete, the presumption is strong that the latter was a descendant of the former and this presumption is strengthened by the fact that the family given-names common to the Massachusetts branch are of frequent occurrence among the descendants of Jotham Bemus. Possibly this sketch may result in the discovery of the "missing link" in this genealogical chain.

PARTICIPATION IN THE BATTLES

It is believed by the writer that in the battles occurring near the Heights Jotham Bemus and three of his sons took part. This has always been a family tradition and considerable evidence exists to prove its truth. William Marvin of North East, Pa., a descendant of Jotham Bemus now living (1894), recently wrote: "I think from what I have heard that your great-great grandfather (Jotham Bemus, Sen.) and his two sons, Jotham and Wil-

"liam, were all in the army and all in the battles of Bemus's "Heights." Mr. Marvin also writes that he has heard William Bemus, son of Jotham, Sen., relate his army experiences, and that his impressions of the occurrences are thus derived from personal conversation with one who participated in the battles.

Jotham Bemus, Jr., the first child of Jotham, Sen., certainly was in the American army as shown by the *Archives of New York*, volume I, page 250.

"**BEMUS, JOTHAM**, Corp. Rhode Island Regt., Jeremiah Olney, Lt. Col. commanding. Enlisted in Col. Van Schaick's for 1 year, '76. Served 6 years, 1 month, 10 days. Discharged by General Washington Jan. 15, '83. A. P. 17-62. Town of Saratoga, badge of merit."

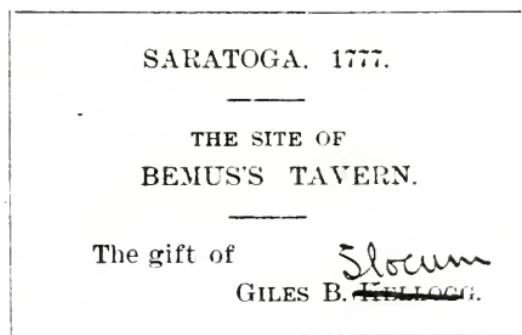
William Bemus, the second child of Jotham Bemus, Sen., was a member of Captain Ephraim Woodworth's company, the 4th, in the 13th regiment, Saratoga district, known as the Saratoga regiment. Col. Van Vechten (or Van Veghten), who was on Gen. Gates's staff, was the regimental commander. He lived at Dove-gat, or Van Vechten's Cove, between Bemus's Heights and Schuyler-ville. Captain Woodworth was also a neighbor of the Bemuses, his house, less than half a mile back of theirs, being used by Gen. Gates as headquarters, after he left the Bemus house. Col. John McCrea was at one time commandant of the "Saratoga regiment." The tragic death of his sister, Jane McCrea, formed a leading incident of the Burgoyne campaign. (See *Archives*, vol. I, page 322 for reference to William Bemus; also page 271, volume 1, for reference to Saratoga regiment.)

That the third son, John, also took part in the struggle is evident from the following extract from his obituary notice published in the *Saratoga Sentinel* Sept 15, 1829: "* * Though "young he was in the American service at the capture of Bur-goyne as a teamster * *."

The Bemus house was used by General ~~Burgoyne~~ as headquarters for a time. When the extension of the American fortifications after the first battle was completed, General Gates moved his headquarters to the house of Captain Ephraim Woodworth on the Heights. After the battle of Sept. 19 the Bemus house was also used by General Lincoln as headquarters. The fate of the Bemus house is established by a letter from Rev. S. Hawley Adams, of Jamestown, N. Y., printed in Stone's *Burgoyne Ballads*, in which he says: "My grandmother, Salley Bemus Crawford, (daughter of Jotham Bemus, Sen.,) was born at Bemus "Heights May 1768. * * She has spent hours in telling me of

"'Burgine' and his army which she saw: of the burning of her "father's house by the British, and of the sufferings of the family "for a time while they were wintering in a barn—Burgoyne "having destroyed all their buildings and crops." Though no mention of the destruction of the house appears in any of the accounts of the battles, it is evident that it was burned in some foray of the enemy after it had been abandoned by Gates and Lincoln as headquarters. It was on the extreme flank of the American lines, and probably more or less unprotected after the first day's fighting, the troops being massed at some distance from the river, near Fort Neilson.

The site of the Bemus house is now marked by a stone tablet bearing the following inscription:



THE DESCENDANTS OF JOTHAM BEMUS.

JOTHAM BEMUS, SEN., who was born about 1738, died, it is believed, about the year 1786 at the age of 48 years. His first wife was Tryphena Moore, who was of Scotch descent. She was a woman of much refinement and culture. In an old family Bible in possession of some of the descendants of Jotham Bemus, Sen., at Bemus Point, Chaut. Co., N. Y., is the following list of his children.

- "1. JOTHAM—No sons, 4 daughters.
- "2. WILLIAM.
- "3. JOHN—No children.
- "4. MARY—Married a Crawford.
- "5. JAMES—Went South.
- "6. NANCY—Married a Hudson."

This meagre record can be filled out to some considerable extent in the case of two of the children, William and Sally. Concerning the others but little is known. Following is the information concerning each of the children so far as obtained. The first four children were by Jotham Bemus' first wife, Tryphena Moore, the fifth child by a second wife whose maiden name is unknown. The "Nancy" whose name is given above was not a child of Jotham Bemus, but was the child of his second wife by a previous marriage. She married a Hudson, and lived in Chatham, N. Y., and had one son whose name was ordinarily called "Plin," but in reality was probably Pliny.

The second wife of Jotham was a woman of violent temper and made the home unhappy for the children of the first wife, and it would seem from the recollections of Mrs. Sally Crawford, the youngest of these, that it was not long after the second wife came into the household before the children of the first wife had to leave it.

Following is what is known of the children of Jotham Bemus:

I. CORPORAL JOTHAM BEMUS, JR., remained in the army until 1786, serving with distinction and receiving the "Badge of Merit." In 1805 (Turner's history of the Holland Purchase, page 460) he took "articles" to land in Western New York in township 8, range 7, and township 9, range 7. In the library of the Buffalo Historical society, in the letters to Joseph Ellicott, agent of the Holland Land company, is a manuscript letter from him dated May 4, 1806, in which he says he "has surveyed lot 44, "township 9, range 7, and is building on lot 37, township 9, range 7." The letter is No. 187, Vol. 8, B. The lots mentioned were situated in the present town of Hamburg, Erie Co. near Buffalo. He was a member of the first grand jury west of the Genesee river, which was chosen in 1803 and sat in the court house just completed at Batavia. Nothing of his descendants, beyond the meagre record of the family Bible—"no sons, 4 daughters"—is known to the writer. It would seem not a difficult matter to trace this branch of the family further. —

II. WILLIAM BEMUS, the second son, was born at Bemus Heights, Feb. 25, 1726 and died at Bemus Point. (Town of Ellery, Chaut. Co., N. Y.) Jan. 20, 1830, in the 67th year of his age. He moved from Bemus Heights to Pittstown, Rensselaer Co. and on Jan 29, 1782 was married to Mary Prendergast, who was born at Pawling, Dutchess Co., March 13, 1760, and died July 11, 1855. Her father was a leader in his section and for his patriotic resist-

ance to the obnoxious rent laws was in 1766 condemned to death for high treason but was subsequently pardoned by the king. William Bemus, in 1805, left Pittstown with his own and his father-in-law's family and journeyed to Kentucky and Tennessee, but came back to New York state and settled on the shores of Chautauqua lake, at Bemus Point, March 9, 1806. In 1804, according to Turner he had taken articles to land in township 2, range 12, the site on which he settled in 1806. He evidently visited the region before the trip south. He was a man of mark in the community, of high character, benevolent instincts and public spirit. He wielded large influence. His children were as follows:

1. DR. DANIEL BEMUS, born Sept. 4, 1784 and settled in Meadville, Pa., where he died in 1866; married, first, Jane Miles, second, Jane Brooks Clark.
2. THOMAS BEMUS, born May 9, 1786. Settled near Westfield, N. Y. where he died June 23, 1829. Married Jane Atkins Jan. 1, 1809.
3. ELIZABETH BEMUS, born Nov. 3, 1789. Married Captain John Silsbee (who was wounded in the war of 1812) Dec. 6, 1808, and died in Iowa.
4. LIEUT. CHARLES BEMUS, born Aug. 31, 1791. Married Relepha Boyd, Feb. 27, 1811, died Oct. 10, 1861; was a soldier in the war of 1812.
5. TRYPHENA BEMUS, born April 23, 1793, married John Griffith Feb. 28, 1809, died Feb. 19, 1841.
6. MEHITABEL BEMUS, born Jan. 10, 1795. Married Daniel Hazeltine Oct. 1, 1818 died Sept. 22, 1889.
7. JAMES BEMUS, born Feb. 2, 1797, married Tryphena Boyd Feb. 14, 1819, died June 2, 1874.

The descendants of William Bemus are numerous in Chautauqua county and are people of influence and standing in the community.

III. JOHN BEMUS, the third son of Jotham Bemus, Sen., was born on the Heights farm in 1763 and lived there until shortly before 1829, when he removed to the village of Saratoga Springs where he died Sept. 8, 1829, in the 66th year of his age. He was married but had no children. He was quite well-to-do and left half his property to his sister Sally (Bemus) Crawford. His wife died some years before his own death.

IV. SALLY, the fourth child of Jotham and Tryphena Moore Bemus, was born May 6th, 1768; married Daniel Crawford of Saratoga Springs, March 22d, 1789; died June 8th, 1865 at Evansville, Ind., buried at Saratoga Springs beside her husband.

She was a woman of great vitality, courage and energy, and was a life long member of the Baptist church. Her husband, Daniel Crawford was for many years owner and proprietor of

"Highland Hall" situated in the southern part of the village of Saratoga Springs. He died in 1839 aged 75 years.

They had eight children: Mary, Jotham, John, Tryphena, Betsey, Margaret, Sarah, Martha.

MARY, m. Darius Davis of Saratoga Springs, and had thirteen children. She died in 1832 aged 42 years.

JOTHAM, m. Electa Jarvis, and had eleven children. He died at Saratoga Springs, July 23d, 1872, aged 80 years.

JOHN, m. Louisa Harris, and had five children. When a young man he went to North Carolina and was engaged in teaching until his death in 1847 at Goldsboro, N. C., aged 49 years. His descendants live now at Goldsboro and Raleigh, N. C.

TRYPHENA, m. Alvah Ostrander who died in 1826, and in 1831 she married Marvin Holden of Elmira, N. Y. She had one child by the 1st marriage and three by the 2d. She died in Hancock Co., Ill., aged 72 years.

BETSY, m. John Andrus, and had three children. Resided at Geneva, Ohio, until 1856, later at Saratoga Springs where she died in 1861, aged 57 years. Mr. Andrus's brother James was a leading citizen of Saratoga Springs and very wealthy.

MARGARET, m. Samuel Hawley of Rochester, N. Y., he died in 1841, and in 1845 Rev. Augustus Pomeroy a Presbyterian clergyman. His pastorates after their marriage were at Fredonia, N. Y.; Ashtabula, O.; Groton, N. Y. She died in 1889, aged 83 years. No children. Both are buried at Groton.

SARAH, m. Grant Adams of Lowell, Oneida Co., N. Y., Jan. 1, 1834. He died in 1866 and she in 1878, aged 70. One child, Samuel Hawley Adams, at this time (1894) pastor 1st Congregational church, Jamestown, N. Y.

MARTHA, m. Ezra Hall of Saratoga Springs. Removed to Evansville, Ind., in 1864. There she died in 1893, aged 82 years. Two daughters.

THE SPELLING OF THE FAMILY NAME.

The descendants of Jotham Bemus should spell the family name *Bemus*, if they propose to follow the orthography undoubt-
edly adopted by their ancestor. This is shown by the fact that letters from Jotham Bemus, Jr., and William Bemus can be seen in the Holland Purchase papers above referred to, in which it is signed in that manner. This spelling we believe is now coming into general acceptance, though in the past the spelling has been extremely varied. The Massachusetts family adhere to the spelling *Bemis*. In the *Calendar of Land Papers* spoken of it is given as *Beemis*. In Justin Winsor's *Critical History of the U. S.* on page 361 of Vol. VI it is given as *Braemus*. In Spencer's *History of the U. S.*, Vol. II, page 500, it is given *Behmus*. Hurd's *History of New London Co.* gives the name *Bemas*. Ephraim Bemish was a soldier at Groton in 1765. There are doubtless many other forms of spelling the name to be found.

DANIEL HAZELTINE POST.

Jamestown, N. Y., June 1st, 1894.

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